

Pesticide

info

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PESTICIDES



California Department of Pesticide Regulation

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How to make friends with your lawn

Your lawn is only a small piece of land, but all the lawns in California cover a lot of ground. That means you and your lawn care activities, along with everyone else's, make a difference to the environment and help protect our waterways from pesticide and fertilizer runoff.

You don't have to be an expert to nurture a healthy lawn. Think about lawn care as a **preventive** health care program, like one you would use to keep up your own health. The idea is to prevent problems from occurring so you don't have to treat them. The secret is to create conditions for your grass to thrive and out-compete weeds, disease, and insect pests. It means setting realistic goals, whether you or a professional service will be doing the

work. Proper planning and care will reduce or eliminate your need for pesticides (including herbicides and weed-and-feed products). If you choose to use pesticides, follow label directions to the letter.

Choose the right grass for your climate.

If your area gets very little rain, for example, don't plant a type of grass that needs a lot of water. In the shade, plant a grass variety that thrives with little sunlight. Find out what grasses grow best in your area from your local University of California Cooperative Extension office. (Get the number in the county white pages in the front of your phone directory.) Or download UC's *Turfgrass Selection for the Home Landscape* (Publication #8035) from <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

ADOPT A PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE PROGRAM FOR YOUR LAWN BY TAKING THESE STEPS:

- **Develop healthy soil.**
- **Choose a grass type that thrives in your climate.**
- **Mow high, often and with sharp blades.**
- **Water deeply, but not too often.**
- **Correct thatch buildup.**
- **Set realistic goals.**



What you put on your lawn can have a bigger impact than you might think. Taking care of the environment begins in our own backyards. (And front yards.)



Single copies of this handout are available by calling your County Agricultural Commissioner's office, from DPR at 916-445-3974, or can be downloaded from DPR's Web site, www.cdpr.ca.gov, "Consumer Fact Sheets."

Keep sharp. Make sure your mower blades are sharp. Dull blades wound the grass and make it more vulnerable to pests and diseases.

Longer is better. Grass needs leaf surface to take in sunlight. This enables it to grow thicker and develop a deeper root system, which in turn helps it retain water better, tolerate insect damage, and fend off diseases. Longer, thicker grass also makes it difficult for weeds to germinate and grow. No single mowing height is best for all turf-grasses. To find out what's best for your lawn, get advice from your UC Cooperative Extension office or check *Mowing Your Lawn* (#8006), a free download at <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

One-third rule. Set your mower so that no more than one-third of the length of the grass blades is removed at any one time. If your lawn is too long to do that, reduce the length in stages, mowing more frequently, following the one-third rule.

Be mellow. Decide how many weeds (and which species) you can tolerate. It isn't realistic to expect a completely weed-free lawn. Dig up weeds by hand and sprinkle grass seed on bare spots so weeds can't fill in. Water regularly with a fine spray until the grass sprouts. Over-seed your lawn each fall by spreading seeds on top. A thick lawn helps crowd out weeds.

Irrigate efficiently. It is time to water when footprints stay compressed for more than a few seconds. Deeper, less frequent irrigations are best for most lawns - they promote deep root growth. (Desert areas, slopes, or areas with shallow soils usually need several, shorter watering times.) Irrigate slowly so water doesn't run off. Over-watering can wash pesticides and fertilizers into the storm drains and contaminate our streams, rivers and bays. Learn how to adjust your sprinklers so that you water more during dry spells and less (or not at all) in the rainy season. To determine the best watering schedule for your area and type of grass, download UC's *Lawn Watering Guide for California* (#8044), <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu>.

Correct thatch buildup. Thatch is a compacted layer of dead plant materials between the grass blades and the soil surface. It can attract harmful insects. Thatch deeper than 3/4-inch can stop water and nutrients from

getting to the roots. Remove thatch by gently raking your lawn in late spring or early summer. To prevent thatch, don't overwater or overfertilize.

Let your lawn breathe. Once a year, aerate your lawn by removing small plugs of earth. This allows air and water to aerate the grass roots. You can have this done professionally, or rent tools to do the job yourself.

Grasscycle. Grass clippings can provide most of the nutrients needed by a lawn if the clippings are small enough to decompose quickly without forming mats on top of the living grass. With frequent mowing, you will have short clippings that will not cover the grass surface if left on the lawn, and will quickly decompose. Consider buying a mulching lawn mower. It cuts grass clippings finer and blows them into the lawn.

Develop healthy soil. To decompose clippings, soil must be biologically active—with bacteria, fungi, insects, worms, and oxygen. Soil under a lawn that has been heavily fertilized or frequently treated with herbicides and insecticides may be deficient in these elements.

Make sure your soil has the right pH balance, key nutrients, and good texture. You can buy an easy-to-use soil analysis kit at hardware stores or contact your County Cooperative Extension office for a soil analysis. This will help you determine what is the right mix of fertilizer for your soil. It's best to use a slow-release fertilizer that feeds the lawn slowly.

Use pesticides sparingly, if at all. Healthy lawns should resist most pest problems, but if you have to use pesticides, make sure you know what pest you are dealing with and pick the least-toxic product best suited to your situation. Read the label before you buy the product and again before you use it - then follow the instructions to the letter.

Know your friends. Think of your lawn as a small piece of nature where pests have their place. Often, nature provides its own pest control in the form of birds, beneficial insects and other organisms that help keep pests under control. Consider natural alternatives—for example, pulling weeds—before using pesticides because pesticides may kill your helpers.